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UNCLAS HANOI 000584

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SUBJECT: DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER ON IRAQ

REF: A. HANOI 0567 B. FBIS SEP20030311000012
- C. STATE 63629

1. (U) In a meeting on March 10 devoted primarily to bilateral ties (ref a), senior Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung described Vietnam's "consistent" policy regarding Iraq: The GVN opposed terrorism, opposed using the excuse of terrorism to invade another country, and opposed weapons of mass destruction. He urged the international community -- working through the UN -- to use "peaceful means" to get Iraq to disarm. (Ref b provides MFA spokeswoman's most recent iteration of the GVN position on March 7.) He specifically noted that Vietnam would oppose a war against Iraq in the absence of a UN Security Council resolution. He emphasized that Vietnam, as a victim of war, opposed war due to the suffering, losses, and deaths of innocent civilians. He noted that a resort to non-peaceful means would be "counter to civilization" in the 21st century.

2. (U) DPM Dung added that Vietnam's "good relations" with Iraq were as two sovereign, independent states that do not interfere in each other's internal affairs and sought mutually beneficial economic ties. He emphasized that Iraq had helped Vietnam during the US embargo on Vietnam by enabling it to purchase oil. He noted that Vietnam owed Iraq USD 500 million for those purchases. (Note: It was not clear whether that was the original or remaining debt.) He said that Vietnam sold about USD 500 million worth of rice, milk, and other commodities to Iraq each year under the UN's Food for Oil Program.

3. (U) Ambassador stressed that the U.S. did not seek war, which could have horrible and unpredictable consequences. He noted, however, as Secretary Powell had recently stated, that the time comes when a clear and credible threat of war is the only way to get a response. He emphasized that Saddam Hussein's very small responses so far had come only because of these threats. He urged Vietnam to use its good relations with Iraq to appeal to its leaders to do what they should have been doing regarding disarmament over the past twelve years. He noted that UN inspectors had confirmed the existence of WMD programs in the 1990s, but we had yet to see sufficient explanations of where these weapons are now. He warned that failure to enforce UNSC resolutions could have serious consequences for the credibility of the institution, citing the example of the League of Nation's impotence when Italy invaded Abyssinia. He stressed that "time was running out" for the Iraqi leadership to cooperate fully as required under UNSCR 1441 and earlier resolutions. DPM Dung reiterated his appeal for "peaceful methods" only.

4. (U) Comment: Vietnam has already made up its mind on Iraq and likely will continue to stick to what it sees as the moral high ground of opposing war in general. We suspect even the passage of an additional UNSCR authorizing military action would not convince the GVN to add its public support to such efforts. There is, sadly, little likelihood that the GVN would ever use whatever channels of communication exist between its leaders and Saddam Hussein to urge Iraq to do the right thing, and quickly. End comment.

5. (U) In light of the above, Embassy will not deliver ref c demarche request.
PORTER